

The complexity of speaking anxiety among students in an international university in Thailand

Jebamani Anthoney ^{a,1,*}, Jeffrey Dawala Wilang ^{b,2}



^a Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Asia-Pacific International University, Saraburi 18180, Thailand

^b School of Foreign Languages, Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima 30000, Thailand

¹ jebamani@apiu.edu; ² wilang@g.sut.ac.th*

* corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 12 January 2023

Revised 27 March 2023

Accepted 14 April 2023

Keywords

International students

Speaking anxiety

Sorting activity

ABSTRACT

Prior research has shown that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students often experience speaking anxiety and its detrimental effects. However, there is limited knowledge about the speaking anxiety experienced by international students at a Thai university where English serves as both the medium of instruction and the primary language of communication outside the classroom. This study employed a three-pronged approach: a survey questionnaire to gauge speaking anxiety levels and identify differences based on nationality and geographical location; sorting activities to observe changes in speaking anxiety levels; and individual interviews to gain a deeper understanding of students' speaking anxiety. The descriptive analysis showed that students experienced varying degrees of anxiety. Among the 13 nationalities surveyed, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, and Burmese students displayed higher levels of speaking anxiety. Moreover, students from rural backgrounds were more anxious than those from urban areas. Interviews conducted after the sorting activities revealed that factors such as familiarity, predictability, competence, and social support influenced students' anxiety levels. Pedagogical recommendations include the importance of repetition and practice, scaffolding, familiarity with an activity, building positive relationships, incremental exposure to language activities, regulating emotions and encouraging reflective practices.



This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](#) license.



How to Cite: Anthony, J. and Wilang, J. D. (2023). The complexity of speaking anxiety among students in an international university in Thailand. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 6(1), 32-43. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v6i1.7876>

1. Background of the study

There can be several reasons why international students experience speaking anxiety in the classroom. They may not be fluent in the language used in the classroom, which can make them self-conscious and anxious about speaking up (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Liu, 2006; Liu & Jackson,

2008; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Woodrow, 2008; Zhang, 2001). In addition, they come from different cultures where the communication style, social norms, and expectations are different from the host country, which can create anxiety when interacting with local students or faculty (Jones, 2004). Also, they may fear being judged or evaluated negatively by their peers or instructors, which can contribute to their reluctance to participate in class discussions or presentations (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Moreover, they may lack confidence in their language proficiency, communication skills, and ability to express themselves effectively in a new language and cultural context (Horwitz et al, 1986; Liu, 2022; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). And lastly, they may feel pressure to perform academically in a foreign environment, which can provoke their anxiety and stress levels, and affect their language performance negatively (Akaraphattanawong, Hongsiriwat, & Methakunavudhi, 2021; Altunel, 2019; Sung & Li, 2019).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a concept developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986, defined as the “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). It can be manifested in a range of physical, cognitive, and affective symptoms, including feelings of nervousness, panic, and helplessness, as well as negative self-evaluations, avoidance behaviours, and reduced motivation to learn. Accordingly, there were three underlying factors including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Those factors were also reported by Kulwattanapaisarn et al., (2022) in Thai context including fear of being less competent than others, negative attitudes toward language class, and beliefs about language learning (see also Akkakoson, 2016). Further findings revealed that both Thais and non-Thais have moderate levels of anxiety in all aspects. In an engineering international program in a Thai university, Wilang (2022) revealed communication apprehension, cognitive processing anxiety, the difficulty of the English medium instruction course, fear of making mistakes, lack of autonomy, perceived negative teacher acts, peer negative evaluation and test anxiety as factors of anxiety when English is used as a medium of instruction. While speaking anxiety in English is a common experience among students in various learning contexts, little research has done among international students in an EFL learning context, for example, a Thai university offering international programs.

Previous literature argued that FLA can have significant implications for language learning outcomes, as anxious learners may be less willing to engage in communicative activities and may experience difficulties in processing and retaining new language input (Desta, 2020; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020). Additionally, it could lead to lower test scores (Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; Trang, Moni & Baldauf, 2013).

Recently, FLA has been reported as a complex and dynamic phenomenon that can be influenced by a range of internal and external factors (see Aydin, 2008; Jen, 2003; Young, 1991), including individual learner characteristics (e.g. personality traits, language proficiency, learning style), task demands (e.g. complexity, novelty, evaluative nature), and social and cultural contexts (e.g. classroom norms, expectations, language policies). Using Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (see Larsen-Freeman, 2017, 2018; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2018), it attempts to explain the phenomenon of speaking anxiety by considering the dynamic interaction between various factors that influence an individual's anxiety levels. For example, speaking anxiety cannot be viewed as fixed or static construct, but rather a complex and dynamic phenomenon that arises from the interaction of multiple factors over time. As stated previously, speaking anxiety is influenced by a range of factors, including personal factors such as prior experiences, personality traits, and beliefs about language learning and communication, as well as situational factors such as the nature of the communication task, the communication context, and the social dynamics of the communication situation. It is believed that these factors interact in complex ways to shape an individual's anxiety levels, which can vary from situation to situation and over time (Wilang & Vo, 2008). For instance, the heartbeat per minute measurement indicates varying levels anxiety due to various factors. Thus, speaking anxiety is not a one-way causal relationship. Instead, it is a bidirectional and dynamic relationship, where anxiety can both influence and be influenced by varying factors (see Wilang & Vo, 2008).

Some tools were used to measure language anxiety. For example, survey questionnaires have been developed to measure speaking anxiety and are widely used. The commonly used are Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986; McCroskey's (1970) Communication Apprehension Test (CAT), which measures anxiety in any communication

situation, including speaking a foreign language; McCroskey & McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), which focuses on interpersonal communication; the Oral Performance Anxiety Inventory (OPAI) developed by Onwuegbuzie and Bailey in 1997, which measures anxiety related to oral performance in academic settings, including speaking a foreign language in a classroom. Thus, new methods were introduced, for example, sorting activity, to capture the complexity of individual beliefs (Haukas & Mercer, 2021).

This study was conducted to address the limited research on speaking anxiety in international universities in Thailand, insufficient exploration of speaking anxiety differences by nationality and geographical location, and lack of understanding on situational triggers for speaking anxiety from a complex dynamic system perspective. Thus, three questions were answered: (1) What is the level of speaking anxiety among students in an international university in Thailand? (2) Are there differences of speaking anxiety level based on nationality and geographical location? (3) What situations provoke the change of the speaking anxiety level among the students?

2. Method

The research was carried out in a small, private Christian international university in Thailand that provides various programs of study, including theology, arts and humanities, business, information technology, nursing, science, and education. The students are from different countries with varying levels of English proficiency and year levels, and approximately 1200 students from 32 different countries are enrolled. The study used a 3-stage mixed method design.

2.1 Stage 1

The first stage involved adapting a speaking anxiety questionnaire from Paranuwat (2011) as it suits the broader context of the present study. Herein, Cronbach alpha indicated 0.91, which means the instrument has a high reliability. The data from the questionnaire was analysed to determine the level of speaking anxiety among the participants and answer questions 1 and 2.

The questionnaire has a 4-point Likert scale, consisting of 25 items. The questionnaire was sent to students through various media channels. A total of 138 students from 13 different countries responded voluntarily (see Table 1), and 10 of those students were selected for stage 2 through convenience sampling based on certain criteria – voluntary participation and high or low levels of speaking anxiety. However, only 4 out of 10 students heed the call for participation. In stage 2, selected students were asked to sort high-anxiety and low-anxiety speaking statements into four categories based on their level of agreement or disagreement, and to provide reasons for their choices. The sorting activity was observed and noted by the researchers. In stage 3, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore the reasons behind the sorted statements. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the speaking anxiety levels of the students, and coding was used to identify the situations that triggered their writing anxiety.

Table 1: Participants in the study

Nationality	Number
American	1
Brazilian	1
Burmese	22
Cambodian	4
Chinese	28
Filipino	4
Indian	2
Indonesian	3
Laotian	1
Malaysian	13
Thai	55
Togolese	1
Vietnamese	3
Geographical location	
Rural	98
Urban	40

The mean scores of the speaking survey questionnaire were interpreted as follows: If the mean score falls within the range of 1.0-1.75, it indicates that the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. If the mean score falls within the range of 1.76-2.50, it indicates that the respondents disagree with the statement. If the mean score falls within the range of 2.51-3.25, it indicates that the respondents agree with the statement. If the mean score falls within the range of 3.26-4.0, it indicates that the respondents strongly agree with the statement. The range of mean scores provides a standardized way of interpreting the responses to the survey questionnaire.

2.2 Stage 2

The second stage used purposive sampling to select students who sorted a number of speaking anxiety statements, which were chosen based on their survey response. The sorting activities were conducted twice, two weeks apart, and involved at least eight to ten statements sorted into four to five random strongly agree and five random strongly disagree statements. The sorting activities were performed on two separate occasions to assess any changes in participants' speaking anxiety levels. The researchers introduced a 2-week interval between the activities to allow participants to forget their prior anxiety levels and reflect on their more recent experiences with speaking anxiety. This stage provided data to answer question 3.

The following procedures were done during the sorting activity. First, three random statements of strongly agree, agree, disagree and or strongly disagree were selected from each participant. Then a board was prepared with numbers 1-4; where 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means disagree and 4 means strongly disagree. Afterwards, the statements were given to the participant. Then he or she placed each statement under the numbers and may provide some reasons during the sorting activity. While sorting, the researchers took note of the reasons. After the student has decided with the placement of the statements, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interview. The similar process was followed in the second sorting activity.

2.3 Stage 3

The last stage of the process entailed carrying out individual semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the factors contributing to the students' speaking anxiety. Participants were prompted to discuss the reasons behind any decrease or increase in their anxiety levels from the initial survey to sorting activity 1 and sorting activity 2. As an example, during the second sorting activity after the two-week interval, participants were asked to discuss the reasons behind their decreased nervousness while speaking, the factors contributing to their increased confidence, and the aspects that led to their enjoyment of speaking.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1. Research Question 1

Table 2 presents varied outcomes of speaking anxiety experienced by students at an international university in Thailand. While they demonstrated confidence in speaking English (item 14) and reported no fear of speaking the language (item 10), they became anxious when required to speak impromptu (item 3) and felt their heart racing when called upon to speak (item 11). These findings suggest that speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue among many students. Factors contributing to this anxiety encompass lack of preparation, physical symptoms such as a racing heart, comparing themselves to peers, forgetfulness due to nervousness, self-awareness, and challenges in maintaining eye contact with the audience.

Table 2: Level of speaking anxiety among the students

Item	M, SD	Interpretation
14. I face the prospect of speaking English with confidence.	2.82, 0.81	Agree
3. I start to panic when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance.	2.76, 0.99	Agree
11. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called to speak.	2.76, 0.98	Agree
10. I have no fear of speaking English.	2.74, 0.98	Agree
24. I keep thinking that other students are better at speaking English than I.	2.67, 1.01	Agree
4. In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.66, 0.96	Agree
25. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	2.65, 1.05	Agree

6. I feel very self-conscious while speaking English in front of other students.	2.64, 0.85	Agree
23. Even if I am very well-prepared I feel anxious about speaking English.	2.60, 1.03	Agree
1. I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English.	2.55, 0.90	Agree
7. I get nervous when I am speaking English.	2.55, 0.95	Agree
22. I find it hard to look at the audience while speaking English.	2.51, 0.97	Agree
18. I feel anxious while waiting to speak English.	2.47, 0.92	Disagree
2. I tremble when knowing that I am going to be called on to speak English.	2.42, 0.97	Disagree
12. I feel relaxed while speaking English.	2.42, 0.90	Disagree
8. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English.	2.35, 1.06	Disagree
21. I have trouble to coordinate my movements while speaking English.	2.35, 0.96	Disagree
5. I feel confident while I am speaking English.	2.34, 0.88	Disagree
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer to speak English in class.	2.33, 0.93	Disagree
17. Certain parts of my body feel very tense while speaking English.	2.32, 0.93	Disagree
19. I want to speak less because I feel shy while speaking English.	2.30, 1.06	Disagree
16. The more speaking tests I have, the more confused I get.	2.25, 0.88	Disagree
9. I get so nervous when the language teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance.	2.18, 0.97	Disagree
20. I dislike using my voice and body expressively while speaking English.	2.18, 0.95	Disagree
15. I enjoy the experience of speaking English.	1.78, 0.79	Strongly disagree

In [Table 3](#), findings suggest that there may be differences in the levels of anxiety experienced by participants based on their nationality. The American, Brazilian, Indian and Togolese participants strongly disagree that they experience speaking anxiety. It is also interesting to note that the Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, and Malaysian participants tend to disagree with the statement about speaking anxiety, indicating that they may feel more confident or comfortable when speaking English.

Table 3: Differences of speaking anxiety based on nationality

Nationality	M	SD	Interpretation
Vietnamese	2.90	0.33	Agree
Cambodian	2.63	0.29	Agree
Thai	2.61	0.07	Agree
Burmese	2.51	0.09	Agree
China	2.43	0.08	Disagree
Malaysian	2.34	0.14	Disagree
Filipino	2.15	0.31	Disagree
Indonesian	2.13	0.44	Disagree
Laotian	1.76	0.00	Disagree
Indian	1.68	0.50	Strongly disagree
Togolese	1.60	0.00	Strongly disagree
Brazilian	1.56	0.00	Strongly disagree
American	1.20	0.44	Strongly disagree

On the other hand, the Cambodian, Burmese, Thai, and Vietnamese participants agree that they experience anxiety. This may suggest that cultural factors or differences in language learning experiences play a role in shaping anxiety levels. More research is needed to fully understand the role of culture and language learning experiences in shaping anxiety levels.

3.2. Research Question 2

Based on [Table 4](#), there seems to be a difference in speaking anxiety levels based on geographical location. The participants from rural areas tend to agree that they feel anxious while speaking, with a mean score of 2.53. On the other hand, participants from urban areas tend to disagree that they feel anxious while speaking, with a mean score of 2.37. One possible explanation for this difference could be the social environment and exposure to English language opportunities in these locations. It is possible that students in rural areas have fewer opportunities to practice English and speak in public, leading to increased anxiety and lack of confidence when speaking. In contrast, students in urban areas may have more opportunities to interact with English speakers and have more exposure to public speaking situations, which could lead to decreased anxiety and more confidence when speaking.

Table 4: Differences of speaking anxiety based on geographical location

Rural/Urban	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Rural	2.53	0.07	Agree
Urban	2.37	0.11	Disagree

The survey questionnaire's findings echoed the outcomes of earlier research (Akkakoson, 2016; Kulwattanapaisarn et al., 2022; Wilang, 2022). Although factors were not directly derived from the data, aspects of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation were indeed present. However, there is an issue with the distribution of the sample population, which impacts the generalization of the results. This limitation could potentially reduce the applicability of the findings to a broader context or diverse student populations.

It is understandable that students from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, as non-native speakers, experience higher levels of speaking anxiety compared to other nationalities. Language proficiency challenges are common among non-native speakers, which can result in difficulty comprehending lectures, engaging in classroom discussions, or accomplishing assignments.

3.3 Research Question 3

To answer research question 3, four cases were drawn to illustrate the situations that provoke change of the level of the students' speaking anxiety. Only the items that indicated a change in participants' speaking anxiety levels were presented in the tables.

Case 1: Olga, High anxiety (M=3.36)

Based on the results in Table 5, it seems that Olga's anxiety level changes, most notably in items 11 "heart pounding when called", 15 "not enjoy speaking", and 16 "more confused when speaking". Regarding the decreased of speaking anxiety, she said, "I feel that I know what to expect", suggesting that uncertainty and unpredictability may contribute to her anxiety levels. When she has a clearer idea of what to expect, her anxiety levels may decrease. She continued,

This time, I know and understand the statements better. I am also more comfortable with the activity compared to the first time.

This suggests that competence and familiarity with the task may also play a role in her anxiety levels. When she feels more competent and familiar with the task, her anxiety level may decrease. Others reasons she has given were familiarity with the activity and comfortability talking with people she knows, and the more she speaks, the more comfortable she becomes. It seems that Olga's anxiety levels are influenced by a variety of factors related to familiarity, predictability, competence, and social support.

Table 5: Olga's chosen statements

Items	Survey	Sort 1	Sort 2
8. afraid when others laugh at me	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree
10. fear of speaking English	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Disagree
11. heart pounding when called	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
15. not enjoy speaking	Disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree
16. more confused when speaking	Disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree

Case 2: Nittaya, High anxiety (M=3.52)

The results suggest that Nittaya's anxiety (refer to Table 6) is influenced by various factors. It is interesting to note items 5 "nervous when teacher asks something", 7 "nervous when speaking", 9 "nervous when teacher asks questions", 12 "not relaxed when speaking", 14 "not confident when speaking", 15 "not enjoy speaking", and 18 "anxious while waiting", suggest decreasing speaking anxiety levels. During the interview, Nittaya stated the following reasons:

This time, I know and understand the statements better. I am also more comfortable with the activity compared to the first time.

I am familiar with the activity.

I am comfortable talking to people I know.

The more I speak, the more comfortable I become.

Table 6. Nittaya's chosen statements

Items	Survey	Sort 1	Sort 2
5. not confident while speaking	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree
7. nervous when speaking	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
9. nervous when teacher asks questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
12. not relaxed when speaking	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
14. not confident	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
15. not enjoy speaking	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree
18. anxious while waiting	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree

Based on the provided statements, it appears that each statement reflects a level of agreement regarding the speaker's reduced anxiety in different situations. The first statement indicates that the speaker's familiarity and understanding of the statements and the activity have increased. As a result, she feels more comfortable, suggesting a decreased level of anxiety. The second statement, familiarity with the activity, implies that the student has a level of comfort and experience with it. This familiarity likely reduces anxiety as the speaker she knows what to expect and how to engage with the activity. With regard to the third statement, it shows that she feels at ease when conversing with people they know, which suggests a decrease in anxiety in these situations. The familiarity and trust with known individuals can create a supportive and comfortable environment, reducing the fear of judgment or criticism. And the last statement suggests that the student's anxiety decreases as she continues to engage in the classroom activities. This progressive decrease in anxiety could be due to building self-confidence, gaining experience, and becoming more adept at handling speaking situations. Such responses have meaningful pedagogical implications.

Case 3: Aldrich, Low anxiety, (M=1.40)

Although Aldrich has low anxiety, one situation that increased his anxiety was when "nervous when he forgets something" (see item 4 in Table 7). He explained,

There was changed in the last activity. I was given a topic I was not familiar with. And the other students seemed more knowledgeable.

The statement suggests that Aldrich's anxiety increased due to several situations. First, the change in the activity. This implies that the student was caught off-guard or unprepared for the new topic. Sudden changes can lead to increased anxiety, especially if the individual feels unprepared or lacks confidence in their ability to adapt quickly. Next, speaking about a subject one doesn't have much knowledge about can naturally lead to feelings of anxiety, as it becomes more challenging to express oneself confidently and provide accurate information. Another situation is comparison with peers wherein the participant felt that other students appeared more knowledgeable about the topic. This comparison can trigger feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which can further exacerbate anxiety. It is also possible that fear of judgment provoked the student's anxiety. It can be deduced that the combination of being unfamiliar with the topic and perceiving other students as more knowledgeable can create a fear of being judged negatively by peers. This fear can contribute to increased anxiety while speaking.

Table 7. Aldrich's chosen statements

Items	Survey	Sort 1	Sort 2
4. nervous when forgets something	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Agree
8. afraid when others laugh	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree

Moreover, he said that he was familiar with the activity that he changed from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘disagree’ on item 8. There could be two reasons: confidence and efficient communication. The student’s familiarity with the activity may have given him more confidence in his ability to participate effectively. This confidence could have led him to feel less of a need to speak up, as they already understand the topic or process. Secondly, as the speaker is familiar with the activity, he may be able to communicate more efficiently and effectively, requiring fewer words or explanations. This efficiency can result in a decrease in speaking.

Case 4: Vince, Low anxiety, (M=1.24)

For Vince’s case (see [Table 8](#)), there was decreased of speaking anxiety in item 8 “nervous when other laugh.” He said,

I changed a little because I think of the people I speak to. So, it shouldn't be that bad if they know me.

The statement suggests that familiarity with the audience could decrease speaking anxiety. By considering the audience, it can help create a more comfortable and relaxed environment for the students, reducing anxiety. The student may have perceived that the audience is less likely to judge her harshly since they already know each other. Also, knowing the audience means that the student might share common experiences and understanding with them. This shared knowledge can make communication easier and create a sense of camaraderie, which can help alleviate anxiety. There might be an increase of confidence as Vince feel more capable of expressing her thoughts and ideas, as she trusts that the audience will be receptive and understanding, which can lead to decreased anxiety.

Table 8. Vince’s chosen statements

Items	Survey	Sort 1	Sort 2
8. afraid when others laugh	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree

It interesting to discuss the individual results based on Freeman-Larsen’s CDST. As stated previously, speaking anxiety could be a nonlinear, dynamic process influenced by numerous interacting variables, which can lead to unique language learning trajectories for each individual. In this context, the cases of Olga, Nittaya, Aldrich, and Vince offer insights into how different factors interact and impact speaking anxiety.

For Olga, the interaction between uncertainty, predictability, familiarity, and competence demonstrates how changes in one aspect can have cascading effects on other aspects of her language learning experience. As her familiarity and competence increase, the nonlinear dynamics of her learning system help reduce anxiety levels. This highlights the importance of understanding and addressing multiple factors to create an adaptive learning environment that accommodates individual needs. Nittaya's case showcases how the interplay between practice, familiarity, and social support contributes to her unique learning trajectory. By engaging in more speaking activities and receiving support from familiar peers, her anxiety levels decrease, illustrating the interconnectedness of these factors within her language learning system. In Aldrich's case, the interaction between preparedness, self-confidence, and fear of judgment reveals how changes in one variable can lead to fluctuations in anxiety levels. CDST helps us understand that learning is a dynamic process, and learners will experience variations in their anxiety levels as they encounter different situations. Vince's case illustrates the role of audience familiarity and trust in the complex dynamic system of language learning. The interconnectedness of these factors affects his anxiety levels, emphasizing the importance of considering the social context in which language learning occurs.

As can be seen from above, each learner's unique set of interacting factors (see [Akkakoson, 2016](#); [Aydin, 2008](#); [Kulwattanapaisarn et al., 2022](#); [Jen, 2003](#); [Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020](#); [Wilang, 2022](#); [Young, 1991](#)) shapes their speaking performance, and understanding these interactions can help educators develop tailored strategies to address speaking anxiety and support language learners in building confidence and enhancing their language learning experience.

Future studies should take into account the following considerations. Firstly, cultural and contextual factors can significantly influence the experience of speaking anxiety. EFL students from diverse cultural backgrounds may exhibit variations in the manifestation and intensity of speaking anxiety, as evidenced by the relevance of these factors in this study's participants. Researchers should be mindful of these factors and ensure that their studies adequately address the specific cultural and contextual contexts of their participants. Secondly, it is important to recognize that speaking anxiety is often self-reported, relying on participants' subjective perceptions and descriptions. Self-report measures may be susceptible to biases, as individuals might underreport or over report their levels of anxiety. Researchers should be aware of this potential bias and consider complementing self-report measures with additional methods, such as behavioral observations or physiological measures, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety in individual cases.

4 Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The current study conducted on speaking anxiety in students from an international university in Thailand has revealed mixed results. While participants displayed confidence and lack of fear when speaking English in certain situations, they experienced anxiety and panic when speaking without preparation or when compared to their peers. The results also highlight the potential influence of nationality and geographical location on speaking anxiety. Participants from specific countries, such as American, Brazilian, Indian, and Togolese, reported little to no speaking anxiety, while participants from other countries, such as Cambodian, Burmese, Thai, and Vietnamese, experienced anxiety. This could suggest that cultural factors and language learning experiences might play a role in shaping anxiety levels. Moreover, participants from rural areas tended to exhibit more anxiety compared to their urban counterparts, possibly due to differences in English language exposure, learning opportunities, and cultural values.

These findings emphasize the need to address speaking anxiety in language learning settings by considering factors such as nationality, cultural background, and geographical location. Educators should be sensitive to the needs of their students and develop strategies to help them overcome anxiety, build confidence, and enhance their language learning experience. Future research should further investigate the role of culture, language learning experiences, and environmental factors in shaping anxiety levels to better understand and support language learners.

Analyzing the individual cases provides valuable insights into the various factors that may influence speaking anxiety levels among language learners. Factors such as familiarity, predictability, competence, and social support play a significant role in shaping the students' anxiety levels. For Olga, uncertainty and unpredictability, as well as a lack of familiarity and competence, contribute to her anxiety. As she gains experience and becomes more familiar with the activities, her anxiety decreases. In Nittaya's case, her anxiety levels decrease as she engages more in speaking activities, becomes more familiar with them, and feels comfortable speaking with people she knows. This shows the importance of practice, familiarity, and creating a supportive environment. Aldrich experiences low anxiety but faces increased anxiety when dealing with unfamiliar topics and perceiving other students as more knowledgeable. This highlights the role of preparedness, self-confidence, and the fear of being judged negatively by peers. Lastly, Vince also exhibits low anxiety and experiences a decrease in anxiety when considering the familiarity of the audience. This suggests that knowing the audience and trusting their receptiveness can boost confidence and alleviate anxiety. Understanding these factors can help educators develop effective strategies to address speaking anxiety and support language learners in building confidence and enhancing their language learning experience.

4.1 Pedagogical implications

The findings offer insights into factors that can influence a learner's comfort and anxiety in various situations. Thus, the following pedagogical implications are drawn:

- Importance of repetition and practice - suggests that learners become more comfortable with activities and statements when they have the opportunity to engage with them multiple times. Educators should create opportunities for practice and repetition to help learners build confidence and familiarity. For example, new

vocabulary words or sentence structures can be used repeatedly to reinforce learning and retention.

- Familiarity and scaffolding - highlights the importance of familiarity with an activity. Learners can feel anxious when faced with unfamiliar topics and perceived expertise of peers. Educators should be sensitive to these situations, providing appropriate guidance, support, and encouragement to help learners navigate these challenges. Also, teachers can use scaffolding techniques to build on learners' existing knowledge and gradually introduce new concepts, helping to create a comfortable learning environment.
- Role of peer relationships - emphasizes the importance of building positive relationships among learners. Teachers can foster a supportive classroom environment by encouraging peer collaboration, group discussions, and opportunities for students to build connections with one another. One possible approach is to pair students with high levels of anxiety in speaking English with more confident peers. However, it is essential for the teacher to closely supervise the activity to ensure that anxious students can derive maximum benefit from the experience.
- Incremental exposure - suggests that learners become more comfortable with speaking as they gain experience. Teachers can incorporate incremental exposure strategies in their lessons, gradually increasing the complexity and frequency of speaking opportunities to help learners build confidence.
- Encouraging self-awareness and reflection - indicates the importance of self-awareness and reflection. Teachers can encourage learners to reflect on their feelings, recognize their strengths, and consider the context of their interactions, helping them better manage anxiety and develop self-confidence. Encouraging students to write reflective journals at the end of their language lessons can be beneficial.

Acknowledgment

The researchers wish to express profound gratitude to everyone involved in this research project, from data collection to analysis, and those who provided valuable feedback. Heartfelt thanks to all contributors and parties who facilitated the completion of this manuscript.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : Jebmani Anthony was responsible for the entire research project. She was responsible for the project approval, data collection, and data analysis. Jeffrey D. Wilang led the writing of the manuscript and the collaboration with the first author. Both authors revised, proofread, and approved the final manuscript.
- Funding statement** : This research received funding from Asia-Pacific International University, Saraburi, Thailand.
- Conflict of interest** : All authors declare that they have no competing interests.
- Ethics declaration** : We as authors acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms with the regulations of our university and that we have obtained permission from the relevant institute when collecting data. We support English Language Teaching Educational Journal (ELTEJ) in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.
- Additional information:** No additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Akkakoson, S. (2016). Speaking anxiety in English conversation classrooms among Thai students. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 13(1), 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2016.13.1.4>
- Akaraphattanawong, A., Hongsiwat, A., & Methakunavudhi, P. (2021). The study of English language classroom anxiety and its relationship with English language proficiency among graduate students in Thai higher education institutions. *Rajapark Journal*, 15(42), 39-54. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/RJPJ/article/view/253187>
- Altunel, I. (2019). Bridging the gap: A study on the relationship between mindset and foreign language anxiety. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 6(3), 690-705. <http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/616>
- Aydin, S. (2008). An Investigation on the Language Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation among Turkish EFL Learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 30(1), 421-444. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512266.pdf>
- Debreli, E., & Demirkan, S. (2015). Sources and levels of foreign language speaking anxiety of English as a foreign language university students with regard to language proficiency and gender. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 4(1), 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v4i1.8715>
- Desta, M. A. (2020). An investigation into the association between learning autonomy, language anxiety and thinking style: University students in focus. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(2), 309-317. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1102.21>
- Haukås, A., & Mercer, S. (2022). Exploring pre-service language teachers' mindsets using a sorting activity. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 16(3), 221-233. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2021.1923721>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
- Jen, C. (2003). Anxiety in English Language Classrooms: An Investigation of Taiwanese Secondary School Students' Foreign Language Anxiety in Four Classroom Contexts (Master's thesis). University of Bristol, UK.
- Jiang, Y., & Dewaele, J. E. (2020). The predictive power of sociobiographical and language variables on foreign language anxiety of Chinese university students. *System*, 89, 102207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102207>.
- Jones, J, F. (2004). A cultural context for language anxiety. *English Australia Journal*, 21(2), 30-39.
- Kulwattanapaisarn, P., Yiamsawat, T., Siripitrakool, P., & soe, W.N. (2022). The English language anxiety of university students in an international program: A case study of Thai and non-Thai students in the English for Business Communication Program at Dhurakij Pundit University. *JLARUS*, 4(11), 99-111. <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/art/article/view/256680>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2017). Complexity theory: The lessons continue. In Ortega, L. & Han, Z. (Eds.), *Complexity theory and language development: In celebration of Diane Larsen-Freeman* (pp. 11–50). John Benjamins.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2018). Resonances: Second language development and language planning and policy from a complexity theory perspective. In Hult, F., Kupisch, T., & Siiner, M. (Eds.), *Bridging language acquisition and language policy* (pp. 203–217). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75963-0_12

- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex systems and applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Liu, M. (2006). Anxiety in Chinese EFL students at different proficiency levels. *System*, 34(3), 301-316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.04.004>
- Liu, M. (2022). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Gender, Discipline, and English Test Performance: A Cross-lagged Regression Study. *Asia-Pacific Edu Res* 31, 205–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-020-00550-w>
- Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 71-86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x>
- Marcos-Llinás, M. & Garau, M. J. (2009). Effects of language anxiety on three proficiency-level courses of Spanish as a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 42(1), 94-111.
- McCroskey, J. C. (1970). Measures of communication-bound anxiety. *Speech Monographs*, 37, 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757809375965>
- McCroskey, J. C. (1982). Oral communication apprehension: A reconceptualization. In M. Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 6* (pp. 136–170). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Paranuwat, J. (2011). A study of foreign language learning of the first year students at Srinakharinwirot University. Srinakharinwirot Universtiy. <https://ir.swu.ac.th/xmlui/handle/123456789/3913>
- Rajitha, K., & Alamelu, C. (2020). A Study of Factors Affecting and Causing Speaking Anxiety. *Procedia Computer Science*, 172, 1053-1058. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2020.05.154>
- Salehi, M., & Marefat, F. (2014). The effects of foreign language anxiety and test anxiety on foreign language test performance. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(5), 931-940.
- Sung, K.-Y., & Li, X. (2019). Factors influencing Chinese language learning anxiety in the classroom setting. *New Waves Educational Research & Development*, 22(2), 1–15. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1243013>
- Trang, T.T.T., Moni, K., & Baldauf, R. B. (2013). Foreign language anxiety: Understanding its sources and effects from insider's perspectives. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 10(1), 95-131.
- Wilang, J. D. (2022). Specific Anxiety Situations and Coping Strategies in Full English Medium Instruction Engineering Programs. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (iJEP)*, 12(6), pp. 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v12i6.33453>
- Wilang, J. D., & Vo, T. D. (2018). The complexity of speaking anxiety in a graduate EFL classroom. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 15(3), 682. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.3.8.682>
- Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELJ Journal*, 37(3), 308-328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315>
- Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Environment: What Does Language Anxiety Research Suggest?. *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426-437. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/329492>
- Zhang, L. J. (2001). ESL students' classroom anxiety. *Teaching and Learning*, 21(2), 51-62. <https://repository.nie.edu.sg/bitstream/10497/350/1/TL-21-2-51.pdf>